3: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1936) 1950 FL11 Luo FL11

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF THE LUO OF KENYA

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114 THIS paper forms part of a short general account of the Luo based on a rapid survey made in 1936. The survey was financed by the Leverhulme Grants Committee. An earlier part, describing the political structure of the Luo, has recently appeared in another journal.[1]

Apart from information provided by Father Hartmann[2] and a fuller account by Mr. K. C. Shaw,[3] early accounts of Luo marriage are slight, and in some cases misleading. Mr. Shaw's account covers a good part of the ground covered by the present paper, but it is useful to have two independent accounts, especially as both were written from information obtained through interpreters. When I went to Kenya I did not expect to visit the Luo and I had not therefore read Mr. Shaw's article. Mr. Shaw and I disagree in a number of particulars in the overlapping parts of our papers. It [184] does not follow from this that either of us is wrong in our statements because, as Mr. Shaw points out, there is some variation in local custom in the different tribes of Luoland. My own information on this particular subject was mostly obtained from [115] the Alego tribe of Central Kavirondo. In the main I have followed the account given me by Pastor Ezekiel of that tribe. In doing so I have omitted much detail.

Simba

836 Courtship and marriage are intimately connected with the custom of making love
882 to girls (*codo*) in the *simba* or bachelors' dormitory, the hut nearest to the entrance to a Luo homestead. Youths arrange with girls to visit them there at night, and when a youth is visited by one of his sweethearts the other young men of the home sleep elsewhere. He plays with the girl and has intercourse between her thighs and they sleep together. He must not penetrate her—that is regarded as shameful, and it will be known on the day of her marriage. If a girl comes from a distance to visit her lover she may spend several nights with him in the *simba*. A girl may have several lovers in different homesteads whom she visits from time to time; she pleases herself in these matters. The young men will not quarrel about her, nor will her father and brothers interfere in her love affairs. She may continue the practice throughout the stages of her marriage to another man right up to the *riso*, the final ceremony of marriage. I [533] was told that a girl does not usually visit the *simba* more often than once or twice a month. Occasionally the lover employs a harpist to entertain the girl and his friends on one of her visits, and there is singing and dancing. Between the songs youths, and sometimes girls also, stand up and boast of their virtues, of the number of their friends and sweethearts, of their wealth, and of their families and lineages; and when they have finished they throw a gift to the harpist, maybe to-day a shilling. Other youths then try to outdo them in boasts and generosity.

[1] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Luo Tribes and Clans', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 1949.

[2] H. Hartmann, 'Some Customs of the Luwo (or Nilotic Kavirondo) living in South Kavirondo', *Anthropos*, 1928.

[3] K. C. Shaw, 'Some Preliminary Notes on Luo Marriage Customs', *J.E.A. & U.N.H.S.*, 1932.

583 with him three or four cows. The party entered the *dala* very slowly
585 feigning indifference and reluctance. The bridegroom made himself as inconspicuous as possible, and tried to conceal himself in the midst of his companions. No ceremonies took place on the day of arrival, but the guests were given food and spent the night in the *simba* hut. On the following day the bridegroom was taken to the hut of the bride's mother and made formally known to her. Meat was killed and the day was spent feasting and drinking. Finally in the evening the bridegroom and the bride's father sat down together and the
[533] bargaining began. The rest of the gathering were entertained by a professional minstrel who sang topical songs, some composed to meet the occasion. His fee, incidentally was a goat, which, for some reason I could not discover, had to be presented to him by the bride. He was also given presents by the girl's father and mother.

During the bargaining the bride's father tried to get as large a payment as possible out of the bridegroom. If he was too greedy the negotiations were broken off, and the bridegroom paid compensation for the expenses incurred in entertaining his party and for the loss of the bride's virginity. But if the two came to an agreement that agreement was final, and no further demands on the father's part or subtractions on the part of the bridegroom were allowed, unless the former demanded to see the cattle before accepting them. This was sometimes done, and if the cattle were unsatisfactory he might refuse to proceed with the marriage. If, on the other hand, he trusted the bridegroom, the negotiations were considered closed, and he might even consent to receive a proportion of the bride-price after instead of before the final marriage feast had taken place, and the girl left her home for good. In this case the bridegroom had to give an extra bull, known as the *ruadh kirisya*, which was sent over for inspection before the feast took place. If it was accepted the final ceremonies were then carried through.

583 In most cases the bride-price itself was paid by instalments over a period that varied with the ability of the bridegroom's father to meet his liabilities. Usually some months elapsed before the whole number of cattle had been handed over, and it might even be a year or two before the girl's father received all that was due to him. During this period it was customary for the girl to pay her future husband a visit from time to time. She was always accompanied on these visits by one or two girl friends, and was expected to stay for several days. She slept in the *simba* hut with her betrothed, and intercourse took place. It sometimes, though rarely, happened that the girl conceived
[844] on one of these occasions. This was bad luck for the girl's parents, but fortunate for the bridegroom, for it was absolutely necessary that the child should be born in his *dala*. He could in consequence hurry on the marriage, which could now take place before the whole of the

11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920)1928 FL11 Luo FL11

585 he enters the hut of the bride's mother, and sticks it in the grass roof. The heifer is called the *roch powo*. The men who brought the cattle return with the chip of the bride, which is given to one of her sisters-in-law, who keeps it. Whenever the bride comes to the village of her husband she wares it again.

585 After some time more cattle are sent. Formerly a dowry sometimes used to run up to 18 or 20 head of cattle. When a certain part of the dowry has been paid
583 off, the bride goes to her husband's village for a few days. About 2 months after she has returned again to her father, her husband gathers his friends. With a harp-player amongst them they go to the bride's village, where her father has killed a big bull for the proper marriage feast *(kisere)*. On this occasion the husband asks the girl's father leave to take his wife to *his* village for good. If he agrees then the girl goes along with him after the feast and takes a hindleg of the bull to the parents and relations of her husband.

585 A few days later word is sent to the bride's village that her husband wants to *riso* i. e. to seal the contract. Wen the messengers return, a bull is killed and all the meat, save one frontleg and the ribs of one side, is taken to the kraal of the bride. Now the girls of her village go to the bridegroom's place, where they grind food and cook it. When the food is dished up, the girls send word to the boys of the husband's kraal. These come and bring their presents, which consist of brass
[301] bracelets, iron beads, finger rings, necklaces, beads, brass rings to put round the neck *(odeyo)*, ect., and all these presents are put together. Then the girls ask the bridegroom for 3 goats. He is supposed to give 3 goats or the equivalent a young bull. When these have been presented then only the girls start their meal consisting of the food they cooked, and the meat and ribs of the bull, which were not taken to the bride's village. They stay over the night. In the morning they devide amongst themselves the presents from the boys and go home.

That day the chip is definitely taken away from the bride, because now she has really become a woman of that village. At night the 2 bones of the cows leg with some meat are cooked for the bride, who calls the other women of the village. These take her for the first time to her mother-in-law's hut. When the bride came to the village on former occasions, she was never allowed to enter that hut, because her son had not fully married her yet.

585 The bride now goes home again where her father gets the ingredients for beer ready, which is to be brewn for his daughter's father-in-law, who comes over
273 with his friends, his wife and the other women of the village, some chosen friends, and a singer, who has to sing at the beer party. The bridegroom does not go along, he has had his feast before; this one is in honour of his father. He takes a bull along and wants to know whether now a sufficient dowry has been paid. Lengthy discussions are held, and the news of their little world as well as old history are talked over round the beerpots, to which they return after their evening meal. Next morning a bull is killed for the visitors, who stay over that day and drink beer from
● [533] early morning till late at night, whilst the minstrel sings his songs and wets his throat alternatively. From the bride he gets the present of a goat for his services. — Once I saw one of these beerparties in full swing, and was told that during the 3 days it lasted so much beer was consumed, that the grain used in its preparations

16: Northcote G-5 (no date) 1907 FL11 Luo FL11

storm of rain broke over the valley, and next morning the complainants were back again to point out that his refusal to come in at the Bwana's summons had so frightened the rain-maker that he had sent rain next day, and to offer most hearty thanks for the white man's beneficent interference.

Though the Jaluo have good manners on the whole, some of their customs are decidedly the reverse of civilised. In common with the other Nilotic tribes of British East Africa, they draw blood from the living cattle and drink it. The custom, however, has its justification, for in many parts of Kavirondo this is the only method by which the natives can obtain salt. Also the older men are confirmed drunkards and hemp smokers, which causes them to age very quickly and probably shortens the average term of life.

Those who dwell on the shores of the great lake and of the larger rivers are expert fishermen: they catch fish with rod and line, a sunken trawl line, in weirs, by woven grass substitutes for nets, and by spearing them with four-pronged wooden spears which they throw with extraordinary accuracy. They are also keen huntsmen, though of little use out shooting, and possess highly trained dogs which will run down an oribi or hare or find a wounded guinea fowl knocked down by their throwing sticks.

In character they are naturally very honest, except with regard to cattle, a temptation which no East African can withstand. They are extremely jealous of any relations between their women and men of other tribes, nations or colour; but among themselves an unmarried woman who has reached the age of puberty may have as many friends, as they call them, as she likes, provided that they come from another clan; after marriage she must confine her attentions to her husband.

Perhaps their most pleasant trait is their love of fun and laughter: the feeblest joke or the slightest bit of horse-play will set them in roars of laughter. For hospitality and industry they have a well-earned name; they are, in fact, in every way most amenable when treated with a little kindness and consideration. They have a considerable knowledge of blacksmith's work, though the spears which they turn out cannot be compared with those of the Masai for fine work. With the latter tribe, however, they show a well-developed artistic sense, the designs on their shields being generally handsome and well carried out. They are also very fond of music—of a kind: they play upon an eight-stringed harp, which is mainly used to provide an accompaniment to their extempore songs, composed in the heroic or comic vein.

Speaking generally and comparatively they are a peaceful, non-aggressive folk, though the common impression that they are cowards is ridiculously wrong: in the writer's small experience of African tribes they have shown themselves better fighters than the much-lauded Swahili, and better policemen than the dreaded Masai; they are certainly more amenable to discipline and less inclined to prefer their own wisdom to that of their officers.

On the other hand they are most painfully litigious: civil cases which arose in

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
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independent progress of the youngsters towards the activities of adult life. At times they are so proud of their successes that they even show their prepared food to their parents; and parents are generally pleased to taste what their children have prepared, even though the articles may not be well cooked.

Female children may also imitate activities involving the care of babies. They make a mould of a baby and a nurse-child, using leaves and some rags for bedding and clothes. The mould-child may be given to one of the younger children, who carries it and so learns how to look after babies. Sometimes maize cobs are used instead of the moulded clay. Children may also imitate the death of a child, and all the children in the group join in the mourning.

Female children are very fond of singing the songs they hear older children sing at festivals. At this age they have a greater inclination to sing than male children, and their songs sometimes help them to quiet crying babies.

As a pastime the nurses engage in 'Kora', a game played with small smooth bits of stone or rounded pieces of broken pottery. This game has a series of rules which every player must observe. Younger children imitate the older ones but are not very successful because their minds and muscles are as yet immature, and they lack the steadiness and precision required for the game. It is interesting to watch, and girls as old as even twelve years take an active part in it. The stones are collected in the palm, then thrown into the air while the back of the hand is turned to receive them, the object of the game being that more than one of the stones thrown into the air must come to rest on the back of the hand. Then by a series of trials one stone is thrown into the air while another on the ground is picked up in time to receive also the stone which has been thrown up. This is